

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

STATE LIVESTOCK SANITARY  
BOARD



“How to Buy a Horse”

BY

CARL W. GAY

*Director of Horse Breeding*

AND

DANIEL S. MILLER

*Assistant Director of Horse Breeding*

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CIRCULAR No. 24

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1913

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HARRISBURG:

C. E. AUGHINBAUGH, PRINTER TO THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA  
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# HOW TO BUY A HORSE

BY

DANIEL S. MILLER, V. M. D.

Space will not permit of the consideration here of more than the simple procedure of buying a horse, under such conditions as usually attend his sale.

It is assumed that the prospective buyer has already become informed in regard to the points of a horse before he actually contemplates a purchase.



## HOW TO BUY A HORSE

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**THE BUYER.** The first step of the buyer should be to decide just what type of a horse will meet the requirements of his business. This decision being arrived at, his object should be to find such a horse and negotiate his purchase at a price which he is well worth. Since much depends upon the nature of the work the horse is to perform, buyers should have this constantly in mind when making their selection.

**PREJUDICE.** It is best for the intending purchaser to enter upon the examination of a horse with a perfectly free and unprejudiced mind, no matter what stories or remarks about the dealer or horse may be current. He is especially advised not to entertain the notion of condemning every horse shown.

**"YOUR EYE IS YOUR MARKET."** Among public dealers "your eye is your market," and the horse to buy is the one that fills your eye; in other words, take a good look at the horse and if you like him and his qualities seem good, go ahead and buy him, no matter what anybody says. The chances are that he will prove satisfactory in the service for which he is bought.

**SALES.** Sales are either public or private. Public sales are conducted by auctioneers and dealers; private sales by private owners and dealers. Sales, whether public or private, are usually followed as soon as possible by a transference of the horse to the buyer, who is allowed two days in which to give the horse fair examination and trial, at the end of which time, if the horse is not returned, the sale is considered complete. "Two days" is the rule most strictly abided by, but under certain conditions this may be extended to ten days or even two weeks.

Letters or evidence bearing upon a contract may complete it in law so that when horses are bought by correspondence the letters and documents act as a part of the contract.

When any defects or unsoundnesses, otherwise apparent, are purposely covered up or hidden in any way, and discovered after the sale, the buyer has redress. The measure of damages he can recover is the difference between the price paid by him and the price he receives upon selling the horse in an open market.

**AUCTIONEERS.** Auctioneers are usually licensed as such and are legally bound to conduct their sales under certain conditions.



**CONDITIONS OF SALE.** The buyer should familiarize himself with the conditions of sale. In all cases horses must be as represented, but in catalogues or bills the owner's statement below the description of a horse is not to be taken as a part of the contract or guaranty. As a rule, age, height, weight and speed are not guaranteed in these sales.

Sales are usually for cash, subject to the terms set forth in catalogues and bills and should be specified at the opening of the sale by the auctioneer.

The owner is the only responsible party in sales. The auctioneer is an intermediate party acting as the owner's agent or representative, but he is also a protection to the buyer as he can hold the seller to any statements he may make concerning the conditions under which the horse is sold.

In most markets horses previously sold may be run through the sale like other horses in order to give life, color and encouragement to the transaction, and this is not considered an unlawful practice.

**SALES RING WARRANTY.** In Chicago, the largest horse market in America, after which many of our eastern public sales places pattern, horses are sold under five different guarantees of soundness, viz:—

1. Sound. The horse meets all requirements of soundness; comparatively rare.

2. Serviceably Sound. Unsound in some respect which does not interfere with his fitness for the particular service for which sold.

3. Sound to Wind and Work. The horse's wind is good and he will work but he is otherwise unsound.

4. Worker Only. True to work. All other conditions are at the eye of the buyer.

5. At the Halter. Carrying with it no warrant or guaranty whatever.

Often horses sold at the halter are those that have been sold under previous guaranties and turned back, or sold to adjust some dispute or difficulty.

When a horse is sold "With all Faults" the seller is relieved from all liability.

**PRIVATE SALES.** It is often desirable for intending purchasers to buy from private owners or dealers, under conditions which permit of more thorough examination, investigation and discussion.

**ELIMINATE THE GO-BETWEEN.** Whenever possible, the buyer is advised to deal directly with the owner. By so doing he eliminates the profits of the middle man which are charged on the price of the horse, is protected from the mercenary interests of



coachmen or agents, and is ultimately better satisfied with the purchase which is his personal selection.

**"EARNEST MONEY."** In the consumation of a private sale it is customary for the purchaser to make a deposit. This is known as "earnest money" and serves as a guarantee of good faith to complete the bargain. Such memoranda should be in writing, stating the terms of sale and the price paid, and signed by both parties concerned in the deal.

**DEALERS.** Dealers may be classified as legitimate and illegitimate, the latter being popularly known as "gyps."

**LEGITIMATE DEALERS.** For a long time it has been the general opinion that horse dealers are dishonest and untrustworthy. The most amazing tales of their duplicity, trickery and deceit have been proclaimed broadcast to the public. The man about to buy a horse, simple as the transaction may be, is inclined, therefore, to go to the dealer's place of business mentally and physically prepared to cope with incidents and surroundings such as he would expect to find in an abode of rogues and swindlers. This is peculiar to the horse business and does not apply to any other vocation with equal force.

If one wants a kitchen stove, an automobile, or a suit of clothes, he goes to the store, looks over the goods, asks prices, makes a selection and pays for it; he does the same thing with any other necessity or luxury of life except when it comes to the purchase of a horse. It is then, with his cold eye of suspicion and a distrustful manner, that he presumes it is his especial right to question the veracity of every statement the dealer makes. Such an opinion is generally unjust and imposes a severe handicap upon the dealer who is endeavoring to conduct his business honestly, establishing a permanent patronage, by selling his goods on their merits.

Let the purchaser go to any reputable dealer, describe what he wants and trust him to give satisfaction. It is seldom that a dealer will attempt to take unfair advantage of a customer whose confidence has been placed in him; but should the buyer assume on all-wise attitude, disregarding the dealer's counsel or discrediting his statements, he alone is responsible for what he buys. A dealer naturally commands respect, and is quick to resent any insinuation against his integrity.

**ILLEGITIMATE DEALERS.** Most salesmen try to present their goods in such a manner as will insure their disposal to the greatest advantage, and horse dealers are not wanting in this respect. This is as it should be, but no dealer has the right to sell his horses through the employment of illegitimate or fraudulent means.

Like others, the horse dealer's business has its full quota of undesirables. These comprise those unscrupulous persons, called

"horse-gyps," whose dishonorable methods are so largely responsible for the false conception of horse dealers as a class. Through their deception and treacherous dealings an honorable occupation has been brought into almost universal disfavor and disrepute.

Their practices are so numerous, irregular and variable that a detailed or lengthy discussion of them here is impracticable, but the following few examples of their methods are typical, viz:—

The "gyp" rents or leases a small private stable conveniently located in a respectable neighborhood and fills it with his stock. Then in newspaper and other advertisements, he offers for sale "Horses, carriages, blankets, etc., the property of Mr. S—— who has gone abroad and desires to dispose of them," or "who disposes of them pending alterations to his stable for a garage." The carriages, harness, blankets, etc., are already "sold" when the buyer arrives. In good faith the intending buyer goes to the address given and eventually comes away the owner of a horse which in time is found to be the subject of some serious vice, as balking, or to be doctored, diseased or in other ways a counterfeit.

The "two days" trial allowed by reliable dealers is as a rule ignored by the "gyp;" the buyer has paid for the horse and it is his. In a day or so the stable is vacant and the "gyp" has disappeared.

A wooden peg driven from the rear between the upper incisor teeth of a cribber, spreads them and produces soreness, thus temporarily preventing the vice. Cotton plugs may be inserted in the ears of horses easily frightened by noises. A sponge placed high in a nostril may stop a nasal discharge long enough to sell the horse. The blistering of an area just below a noticable swelling on a hock makes the part appear smooth and for a while renders the original swelling invisible.

The most elementary procedure commands the buyer to beware of such frauds and avail himself of all the special knowledge he possesses in the judgment of horses, if he chooses to deal with this class.

**PRIVATE OWNERS.** The majority of horses are bought originally from private parties, under circumstances which impose the responsibility for their selection upon the buyer.

Thrown upon his own resources the buyer must be thorough and systematic in his examination of the horse submitted for his acceptance.

**STALL INSPECTION.** The horse is subject to some conditions and diseases most apparent when he is "cold" and in his stall. Under the stress of exercise and excitement he may be warmed out

of these defects so as to make them scarcely noticeable to the average observer.

Therefore, the horse should be first seen in the stall and gone over in every particular. His standing positions, disposition, intelligence or unsoundnesses are here especially noticeable.

Cribbers, weavers, tail rubbers, and stall-post-kickers show their tricks in no other place as well. Observe carefully any marks on the manger or within the stall which may suggest vices, habits or tricks, also the manner in which the horse is turned around or how readily and easily he is backed from the stall.

**EXAMINATION STANDING.** Have him stood at the halter on level ground or floor in good daylight and make a thorough examination of the horse, paying particular attention to his eyes, wind, feet and limbs. Something may be learned from the way the horse stands, that is, his natural attitude, hence while in this position he should be viewed from every angle.

He should be made to stand up, and while in this position notice if he bears his weight firmly and squarely on all four feet, not resting or favoring in the slightest a weak limb or tender foot. Test each foot in all of its parts, noticing if any part of the hoof is tender to touch, to light tapping or reasonable pressure.

It is preferable, but not always practicable, to examine horses with feet unshod. When pairs are shown notice if both horses are shod alike, or if the shoes have been altered in some manner to equalize their heights, or weighted to increase the flexion of knees and hocks.

Examine in turn the horse's poll, ears, eyes, nostrils, lips, teeth, tongue, neck, mane, shoulders, withers, back, loins, croup, tail, genitals, limbs and feet. On horses of solid color areas of white hairs frequently mark the sight of previous galls or other injuries, as for instance those so often noticed in the region of the withers due to misfitting harness or saddle. Gray hairs upon the upper part of the head and about the eyes frequently indicate age.

**EXAMINATION MOVING.** Horses with sound, properly shod feet whose natural standing position is correct are not likely to interfere, forge, go-lame or give similar trouble.

Horses which stand squarely on their legs go in a straight line, while those that are toed out or "splay footed" are liable to interfere from the fact that their feet are carried in a circle inward and forward in the stride. The reverse is true of a wide fronted horse, which stands toed in, they paddle or wing by virtue of their feet being carried outward and forward.

When walked, trotted, ridden or driven, view the horse from the rear as he leaves you, from in front as he approaches you, and from the side as he passes.



**SHOWING.** Making a horse stand in the camped position, that is, stretched out in front and behind, tends to level his back and croup, and straightens his legs.

Standing him up hill greatly improves his general appearance. A clever groom or other attendant in leading, riding or driving a horse may pull his head to one side to hide some slight lameness or in other ways so manage him as to render some fault, vice, habit, whim or serious defect unnoticeable to a careless observer.

**VETERINARY ADVICE.** Concerning navicular disease, spavin, quittor, broken wind, bad eyes, etc., or any condition likely to interfere with the horse's future usefulness, the advice of a veterinarian should be sought.

**SOUNDNESS.** A horse is sound provided there be not a partial or total loss of function, preventing or likely to prevent him from performing the ordinary duties of his class.

We can hardly expect to find such soundness as perfection of animal form and health of body, for an absolutely sound horse is very rare, but every horse said to be sound should be able to see and hear clearly and possess good wind.

**COUNTENANCE.** In the purchase of a horse it is wise to observe his general countenance. A horse's facial expression generally reflects his character and disposition. It may portray illness, pain, anger, fear, stupidity or timidity as readily and plainly as it may show willingness, happiness, intelligence and contentment. The eyes, ears, lips, and mouth should be watched.

A depressed or a Roman face may suggest some flaw in character. A soft eye and general regularity of features seems to indicate gentleness and refinement, while the "pig-eye" suggests a low degree of intelligence and breeding.

**CONSTITUTION.** The manifestation of vigor and vitality can only be present when all the organs of the body that have to do with digestion, circulation, respiration and the nervous system which controls all, continuously perform their full work. This maximum efficiency makes up constitution, and is indicated nowhere else so satisfactorily as in the expression of countenance, heart and flank girth, condition of coat and in the general bearing.

**CONDITION.** Most horses are sold fat. It enhances their good points and obscures many defects otherwise easily seen. A buyer should be able to "see through" such a covering and satisfy himself that the horse is one of real merit, and not one purposely fattened to make him sell.

**AFTER WORK.** On return to the stable the horse under examination should exhibit no timidity, irritability or weakness of limb or wind, either immediately or after the lapse of an hour.

If possible, see him unhitched and unharnessed, groomed, blanketed, watered and fed, but in these matters one must be governed by circumstances.

**TRYING OUT.** Horses should be tried out according to their class. If, for example, it is a draft horse, he should be harnessed and put to a suitable loaded wagon or cart, which he should be required to pull and to back over roads or pavements such as he is likely to work upon after his purchase. If a saddle horse—ride him.

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Nothing can do more to put the horse business on a sound business basis than greater intelligence and discrimination on the part of the users of horses.

Buying horses "right" is **not getting** something for nothing, but securing horses "worth the money" paid for them. It is just as essential that real merit **shall** be appreciated as that counterfeits shall be detected.

Intelligent discrimination on the part of the buying public has the effect of promoting the interests of the legitimate dealer, while gradually forcing the "gyp" out of business, at the same time insuring greatest satisfaction to the buyer himself. And, most important of all, it makes it worth while for the breeder to produce the best and the best only.







